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The effectiveness of group counseling based on interaction relationship analysis on marital boredom and couples' intimacy

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Abstract

Introduction: Analysis of the interaction offers us an image of human psychological structure that can be used for increasing marital intimacy and decreasing marital boredom. This study aimed to study the effectiveness of group counseling based on an analysis of the interaction relationship between marital intimacy and couples' intimacy.

Materials and Methods: The statistical population of this clinical trial included all couples living in Kermanshah in 2016. Simple randomized sampling was used as sampling method. 40 people (20 couples) were selected and were randomly placed in two experimental and control groups. All subjects responded to the questions of marital boredom and couples' intimacy questionnaire and the questions related to the demographic characteristics before and after intervention. Group counseling with interaction relationship analysis was conducted weekly in 10 sessions (60 minutes). The descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and variance) and covariance analysis were used to analyze the data through SPSS.22mn software.

Results: According to univariate covariance analysis, there were significant differences between control and experimental groups in total score of marital boredom ($F(1,28)=28.45, P<0.0001$), physical fatigue ($F(1,28)=34.49, P<0.0001$), emotional fed up ($F(1,28)=14.10, P<0.0001$) and mental fed up ($F(1,28)=11.34, P<0.0001$).

Conclusion: The results showed that the interaction relationship analysis approach could increase the intimacy of married couples and decrease their boredom. The findings of this study can be used for education and health care programs.

Keywords: Interaction relationship analysis, Marital boredom, Marital intimacy

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Introduction

Family, this small social unit, is one of the main pillars of society, which is formed by a process

called marriage. Marriage means legalizing a relationship between two people; in fact, the primary purpose of marriage is the relationship

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(1). No other relationship can lock two adults who may know little about each other for life (2). Since humans are social, as a result, they tend to social life and form a group, the smallest unit of which is the family, or rather, the smallest unit is the couple, which usually becomes a family after a process. Communication is exchanged between every couple, which leads to the creation of a wide range that affects each other and, as a result, provides an ideal space for growth, or vice versa. All these steps and communications are wrong. So it goes on until this range of communication creates a faulty interaction and causes marital problems. Marital relationship is the central core of the family system, and disruption seriously threatens families' survival. A person's satisfaction with a marital relationship is considered his satisfaction with the family, and satisfaction with the family is his overall life satisfaction (3).

Men and women come together to satisfy each other's needs appropriately. Different types of communication between couples can satisfy different needs. For interaction and relationships between people, there is a need for conditions that vary depending on the type of relationship. The most important relationship between human beings is the marital relationship. In the opinion of family and couple therapists, marital relationships are not ordinary. Good relationships between couples can be measured through mutual interest, the amount of care for each other, and acceptance and understanding of each other (4). Marital satisfaction provides an overview of the current state of the relationship. Also, one of the common concepts to show the level of happiness and stability of the relationship is the concept of marital satisfaction (5). A marital relationship allows husband and wife to discuss and exchange opinions, solve their problems and be aware of each other's needs. In family life, warm relationships and intimate interpersonal interactions that can lead to the growth and development of people are among the most important goals and needs of marriage (6).

The increasing number of marital conflicts in the contemporary world for various reasons, as well as the risk of separation and its negative effect on the mental health of couples, has caused counselors, especially those who work with families, to come up with theories and plans to

help Offer to conflicted and divorcing couples. In the field of couple therapy and intervention in the family, various practical models have been created based on different perspectives, whose primary goal is to help couples prevent conflict, increase the family's efficiency, and treat marital conflicts (7), which includes this perspective. It is a correlation analysis approach. Interrelationship analysis as a personality theory provides us with a picture of the psychological structure of humans, which can reach the goals of treatment in a short time (8). This theory is presented by presenting a three-part model under the title of egoistic states. This personality model helps us to find out how people act and behave and how they reveal their personality in the form of their behavior. The analysis of mutual behavior also provides a theory for communication, which can be used to analyze organizations and management (9). The theory of interaction analysis is an excellent and suitable approach for group and group therapy. Bern believes that group therapy with the approach of interaction analysis, in which members can experience the plan and instructions of their lives, which originated from early memories, in interaction with each other, is the best treatment choice for people (10). The ego model is essential to the theory of mutual behavior analysis. An egoistic state is a set of related behaviors, thoughts, and feelings through which a part of one's personality is revealed at a particular time. This pattern depicts three different and separate emotional states (11). The body introduces the manifestations of these three emotional states under the title of "I" states (I am a child, I am an adult, and I am a parent) (12).

Research has shown that the quality of marriages is constantly decreasing (13). One of the symptoms of decreased satisfaction in married life is heartbreak. Heartbreak starts with a discrepancy between people's expectations and ideals on the one hand and reality on the other, and the result is stress. Stress may be experienced consciously or unconsciously for long periods. After stress appears in the first stage, emotional pressure, burnout, and fatigue are gradually created in people, and changes in attitude and behavior are created in the next stage. In this stage, the attitude of people in The case of married life and spouse changes, and finally,

burnout appears (14). Rather than focusing on the pathology of the individual or the couple, the psychology of marital burnout focuses on the long-term and erosive process of weakening marital relationships, which is the result of tensions imposed from within or outside the relationship, especially when the person tries to cope with the relationship. For example, his neighbor created an existential meaning for himself so that he could fulfill his needs (15). Burnout is a set of symptoms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced productivity. Emotional exhaustion is the depletion or emptying of emotional resources caused by interpersonal demands. Depersonalization emphasizes negative development and cruel, fault-finding, and suspicious tendencies toward having a spouse, which includes confusion and distress utterly different from the psychiatric aspect of these symptoms (16).

Now, the question is raised whether the intervention based on mutual relationship analysis can work in couples' affection and intimacy cases. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the effectiveness of a therapeutic intervention based on the analysis of mutual communication on couples' heartbreak and marital intimacy.

Materials and Methods

The statistical population of this clinical research included all couples in Kermanshah city in 2015. In this research, people were randomly divided into two groups after the pre-test. Considering the nature of the research community, a simple random sampling method was used to select the sample for this research. In this way, 40 people (20 couples) were selected by placing notices in the counseling centers of Kermanshah, and then they were randomly divided into two experimental and control groups (each containing 20 people). The couples who volunteered to participate in the research were asked to complete the questionnaires. These meetings were held for ten sessions of 60 minutes. The meeting place was in one of the counseling centers in Kermanshah. The criteria for entering the study were couples with at least a bachelor's degree, at least one year, and at most ten years of their life together, and they were

willing to continue the meetings. The criterion for leaving the research was providing incomplete and invalid information.

To carry out the research, all the subjects before and after the implementation of group counseling with the approach of mutual relationship analysis for the subjects of the experimental group, to all the items of the questionnaires of marital dissatisfaction (17) and intimacy. In addition, marital (18) and questions related to demographic characteristics were answered. The researcher also committed to carrying out this intervention for the control group after the end of the research in order to comply with the ethical principles. Group counseling with the mutual relationship analysis approach developed by Stewart and Jones (19) was conducted during ten sessions of 60 minutes and weekly. This course included lectures, questions, answers, group discussions, exercises, and homework (workshop). The entire intervention process lasted four months.

Research instruments

A) Couple Burnout Measure (CBM): It is a self-assessment tool designed to measure the degree of marital burnout among couples. CBM is adapted from another self-report instrument used to measure burnout (BM). CBM was invented by Pines (17). This questionnaire has 21 items, including three main components: physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and mental exhaustion. All these items are answered on a seven-point scale. Level 1 represents no experience of the desired phrase and level 7 represents a lot of experience (17). The evaluation of the CBM reliability coefficient showed an internal similarity between the variables in the range of 0.84 and 0.90. In research to obtain the validity of CBM, this test was correlated with the Enrich Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire. The correlation coefficient between these two questionnaires was -0.40, which is significant at the $P < 0.001$ level. (18).

B) Marital Intimacy Scale: This scale was created by Thompson and Walker, which has 17 questions and is set to measure the level of intimacy between couples. The range of scores for each question varies from 1 (never) to 7 (always), with higher scores indicating greater intimacy. This scale has good internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of 0.91 to

0.97 (19). The score of each subject is obtained by adding up the scores of the questions and dividing them by the number 17.

The research results indicate that the reliability coefficient of the whole scale using Cronbach's alpha method is 0.96, which indicates the acceptable reliability of the questionnaire (20). Calculating the reliability coefficient by removing individual questions also showed that removing any of the questions does not have a noticeable effect on the reliability coefficient (20).

Also, the reliability of this questionnaire was obtained in research with Cronbach's alpha method of 0.92 (21). In this research, in order to analyze the obtained data, descriptive statistics of average, standard deviation, and variance were first used, and then, in line with inferential analysis, covariance analysis was used. The above analyzes were carried out using SPSS version 22 software.

Results

Among the 20 couples participating in the present study, ten couples were evaluated in the counseling group with the mutual relationship analysis approach and 10 in the control group before and after the training with research tools. The average age of the subjects was 39.54 years with a standard deviation of 6.08, which included the age range from 29 to 53 years. In addition, nine people (22.5%) had a diploma level education, 21 people (52.5%) had a bachelor's degree, and ten people (25%) had a master's degree. Among them, five people (12.5%) between 1 and 5 years, 13 people (32.5%) between 5 and 10 years, 17 people (42.5%) between 10 and 15 years, and the number of 5 people (12.5%) have been together for more than 15 years. Table 1 shows the scores of the participants and the results of the one-way analysis of variance regarding the research variables before the start of the intervention.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and results of one-way analysis of variance for the scores of research variables before the intervention

Type of training	Interaction relationship	Control group	F	P
Scales/subscales	Mean	Mean		
	Standard deviation	Standard deviation		
Boredom	50.46 (7.13)	60.86 (9.14)	$F_{(1-28)}=12.07$	0.01
Physical fatigue	23.20 (4.14)	27.60 (5.85)	$F_{(1-28)}=5.65$	0.02
Emotional fed up	13.66 (4.22)	15.46 (3.27)	$F_{(1-28)}=1.70$	0.20
Mental fed up	13.60 (4.06)	17.80 (4.21)	$F_{(1-28)}= 7.71$	0.01
Marital intimacy	28.53 (6.45)	30.46 (5.46)	$F_{(1-28)}= 0.78$	0.38

Table 1 shows that the total score of the marital intimacy scale and the emotional exhaustion subscale are not statistically significant. This problem shows that the two training and control groups were the same regarding the measured variables before any intervention.

However, at the same time, the subscales of physical fatigue, psychological exhaustion, and the total score of marital despondency statistically have a significant difference before the intervention ($P < 0.05$). None of the sub-scales related to burnout and marital intimacy are significant in Levene's test. Therefore, it can be said that both groups were homogenous in terms

of variances in terms of research variables before the start of the intervention. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check the hypothesis of normality of data distribution indicate that all the subscales of intimacy and marital intimacy follow the hypothesis of normality.

The homogeneity of the regression showed that none of the subscales of affection and marital intimacy are significant in the homogeneity of the regression. In order to investigate the effect of interrelationship analysis counseling on the total score of the marital intimacy scale, a univariate analysis of covariance was used.

Table 2. Covariance analysis test to investigate the effect of mutual relationship analysis counseling on the total score of the marital intimacy scale

Source of changes	Sum of squares	Freedom degree	Mean of squares	F	Significance level	Size of effect
Pre-test	374.89	1	374.89	3.30	0.08	0.10
Effect of group	2438.95	1	2438.95	21.51	0.0001	0.44
Effect of error	44.3060	27	35.113			

Based on the results of the univariate covariance analysis, it can be said that there is a correlation between the experimental and control groups in the marital intimacy scores in the pre-test ($P < 0.05$, $F = 3.30$) and the counseling group ($P < 0.001$, $F = 21.51$) there is a statistically significant difference.

Multivariate covariance analysis was used to investigate the difference in the two experimental and control groups regarding the total score and subscales of marital burnout. The evaluation of the characteristics of the data showed that the

statistical assumption of homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrices for the components of marital dissatisfaction (Box's $M = 70.08$, $P < 0.001$) is not established, and therefore, to evaluate the significance of the multivariate effect of the index Pillai was used. Pillay's index showed a significant group effect on the linear combination of dependent variables. In other words, there is a statistically significant difference between the two experimental and control groups in at least one of the components of marital burnout.

Table 3. The results of the analysis of variance of the marital burnout scores in the experimental and control groups

Variable	SS	df	MS	F	P
Marital boredom	2650.80	2	2650.80	28.45	0.0001
Physical fatigue	720.30	2	720.30	34.49	0.0001
Emotional fed up	172.80	2	172.80	14.10	0.001
Physiological fed up	124.03	2	124.03	11.34	0.002

Univariate ANOVA statistics were performed on each dependent variable separately to determine the significant source of the multivariate effect. For example, Table 3 shows that the group significantly improved on the total score of marital burnout, physical fatigue, emotional collapse, and psychological collapse has an effect.

Discussion

The study showed that the group counseling approach based on mutual relationship analysis could increase the marital intimacy of couples. In other words, marital intimacy was statistically significantly different between the two groups of mutual relationship analysis and the control group. In this way, the participants in the counseling group based on mutual relationship analysis had higher marital intimacy in the post-test than the control group. This finding confirms

that training couples' communication skills using the communication analysis approach in a group manner increases marital intimacy and reduces marital burnout. This finding is consistent with the results of research (22) that teaching communication skills and conflict resolution to couples who have problems in their marital interactions improves their marital relationships, reduces conflicts, and increases their mental health. It is also consistent with the findings of studies (23-25). In line with the results of this research, family therapists and couple therapists often report that poor communication is a common feature of families with problems. Poor communication causes many family problems, including severe family conflicts, failure to solve problems, lack of intimacy, and weak emotional bonds; Here, the meaning of communication is not only the verbal dimension but the practical and influential communication with others in

both the verbal and non-verbal dimension is considered (26). After the first months of life, some couples help to reduce reinforcers due to being involved in life issues and problems or not believing in the necessity and effectiveness of behavioral skills.

On the other hand, conflicts and resentments and their unresolved causes increase annoyance and negative feelings and, as a result, unwillingness to perform pleasant behaviors and increases negative behaviors, such as inattention, blame, and humiliation. In addition, the lack of accurate knowledge of spouses and individual differences in reinforcement and punishment should not be ignored in explaining this issue. Due to the type of relationship, many spouses are unaware of what reinforcement or punishment is for the other party. Also, problems related to couples' intimacy are primarily the result of failure to establish correct relationships. The depth of intimacy that two people create in their relationship depends on their ability to correctly and effectively convey their thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires. Therefore, learning communication skills increases intimacy and reduces marital burnout. The effect of communication skills on marital relationships as the primary determinant of marital satisfaction and compatibility has been investigated in several studies (27). Burn believes that the human personality is organized into three separate states of the self, i.e., "parent self", "adult self," and "child self", which can use each of these three states in communication (28). Adult-to-adult, parent-to-parent, or child-to-child relationships are complementary and lead to relationships where both parties feel they understand each other. As long as two people's exchanges are complementary, communication will proceed smoothly and appropriately. Cross exchanges occur when the "own state" addressed is not the state that responds. The secret to helping husbands and wives in terms of communication issues is to help them become aware of their states and recognize how these states interrupt each other instead of complementing each other. If they can recognize the state of themselves that is involved in cross-exchange and return to the state that is being addressed, they will be able to participate in complementary exchanges that go on indefinitely (14). Ex-lovers should learn how

to talk to each other, listen to each other, interpret each other's behavior differently and express their needs to create understanding, and intimacy, enjoy each other's existence and reduce loneliness. Have a successful marriage. At the end of the group family counseling program, and if necessary, in individual sessions, this couple should learn that to maintain understanding, intimacy, and enjoyment of each other's existence, they must continuously work on their mutual relationship with their spouse (28).

In explaining this finding, it can be said that communication skills lead to checking and improving the way couples communicate, and these skills are primarily at a very low level before training. In addition, these incomplete and incorrect communication skills overshadow marital relationships. Therefore, training in communication skills improves the lousy relationship between husband and wife and causes the elimination of misunderstandings, reduces resentment and anger, pays attention to the positive aspects of each other's behavior, and ultimately increases marital intimacy and reduces heartbreak. Therefore, it can be expected that according to the techniques used in the approach of mutual communication analysis, the intimacy process in marital relations will increase and cause the improvement of couples' relations.

This research, like other research, has limitations that require consideration in generalizing the results. The present research was conducted on the couples of Kermanshah city, so caution should be observed in generalizing the results to couples of other cities and regions. Another limitation of this study was that follow-up studies were not conducted due to time constraints and lack of access to clients. The use of self-reporting tools is also one of the other limitations of the present study. According to the results of this research, it is suggested to include the follow-up correlation analysis approach in future research to more accurately determine the therapeutic effects and compare their results with the results of this research. It is recommended to increase the number of subjects and participants in the treatment in future research to obtain more complete results and, of course, the possibility of a more accurate generalization of the findings. It is suggested that researchers compare the effectiveness of mutual relationship analysis

therapy with other therapeutic approaches in the marital and family spheres to get a clearer picture of the effectiveness of this therapeutic method according to the cultural context of our country. It is suggested that researchers examine the effect of this treatment model on other marital variables and also examine different treatment processes in the form of case research projects. It is recommended to perform a follow-up test after the treatment period to evaluate the long-term effects of this treatment method, consolidate the training of the final sessions, and finally conduct reminder sessions after the end of the treatment period to prevent the treatment effect from falling.

It is also suggested that counselors and family therapists use these two treatment approaches in couple therapy and family therapy groups, and family education classes to solve marital problems.

Conclusion

The results of the present study indicated that the approach of analyzing the mutual relationship increased the marital intimacy of couples and reduced their burnout. The present research findings can be used to develop educational and therapeutic programs.

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